

AWARD-WINNING

XERISCAPES

**Arizona Department of Water Resources
& Tohono Chul Park** team up again to honor
Tucson's best water-smart landscapes

Water in the desert is a precious and finite commodity. It becomes more and more clear with each passing day that it's in our best interest to make what we have last. Conserving water used in our landscapes is something everyone can do. But it takes some planning and thought to create water-efficient landscapes that we

also want to spend time in! Thus the reason and value of Xeriscape, a common-sense approach to landscaping used by desert dwellers for decades.

The Arizona Department of Water Resources and Tohono Chul Park teamed up earlier this year to honor the best Xeriscapes in Tucson. Judged by local experts, the winners received their awards at a ceremony at Tohono Chul Park this past May.

WRITTEN & PHOTOGRAPHED BY SCOTT MILLARD

Visit the Frink-Merrick home, and you quickly realize this landscape is a labor of love. In fact, the owners have spent the past seven years planting the garden and building its surrounding trails and structures. The result is a magical landscape where visitors are prone to linger. The meandering but well-groomed pathways invite exploration and will take you completely around the one-acre property. You'll even walk over a small wooden bridge that spans a narrow, dry wash running along the edge of the landscape. You're not really sure what may be around the

1ST ★ PLACE

HOMEOWNER CATEGORY

2nd-annual J. D. DiMeglio
ARTISTRY IN LANDSCAPING AWARD

Frink & Merrick residence

corner—a terraced garden takes up residence on a slope that previously had but a few plants. It is now complemented with butterfly favorites: ageratum, lantana, salvia, and kidneywood. A nearby cactus garden is alive with golden barrels, succulents, and old man cereus. In the rear yard, several smaller gardens entice you to pause and enjoy the subtle desert shapes and colors and to simply stay a while to soak up the relaxing atmosphere.

Plants throughout the landscape were selected for their low water consumption, replacing high-water lawn and roses. Almost all are desert natives or adapted plants from other low-rainfall regions. These include native mesquite and palo verde, desert hackberry, hopseed bush, agave, several kinds of opuntia (prickly pear) cactus, yucca, Texas ranger, rosemary, and San Diego sage.

Shortly after this property was named the winner of the J. D. DiMeglio Artistry in Landscaping Award, one of the judges gave it that highest of compliments: “We all wanted to go to a party there!”

THE AWARDS

HOMEOWNER CATEGORY

- **1st Place, Homeowner Category**, plus **J. D. DiMeglio Artistry in Landscaping Award**—Frink & Merrick residence
- **2nd Place, Homeowner Category**—Coniglio residence
- **Most Water-Efficient Landscape**—Jaramillo & Gomez residence

PROFESSIONAL CATEGORY

- **Distinguished Xeriscape Award**, plus **Best Use of Natives to Attract Wildlife Award**—John Chinnock, Landscape Architect, for the Nature Conservancy’s Tucson Conservation Center
- **1st Place, Public Education**—Sage Landscape Architecture, for Saguro Girl Scout Hacienda
- **Best Revegetation**, plus **2nd Place, Public Education**—Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, for the Yucca Moth Garden and Mountain Woodland
- **Best Landscape for Attracting Urban Wildlife**—Clay Thompson, Harlow Gardens, for Herr residence
- **Best Low-Maintenance Landscape**—John M. Harlow Jr., Harlow Gardens, for Wetlaufer residence
- **Best Retrofit of a High-Water-Use Landscape**—Margaret West, M. West Designs, for Kennedy & Prebis residence

2ND ★ PLACE
HOMEOWNER CATEGORY

Coniglio residence

Jenny Coniglio has been making this “her” garden since July 1999. The previous owners had installed several plants, including bougainvillea and cape honeysuckle vines along the fence, as well as the now-expansive, bright green myoporum ground cover that protects the slope in the back. It works as a lawn substitute in areas that won’t be walked on, adding a cooling effect, as well as reducing the sun’s glare. Gray-leaved trailing indigo bush serves as a

companion ground cover. It, too, makes an excellent slope cover. A young hybrid mesquite will soon provide cooling summer shade on the back patio.

A mini-oasis planting, close to the home where it can be easily enjoyed, can even be seen from indoors. Flowering plants include columbine, scarlet betony, and yellow bells. Rain runoff from the roof helps irrigate these plants, and water is also harvested in rain barrels for use during summer months.



MOST WATER-EFFICIENT LANDSCAPE

Jaramillo & Gomez residence



Sheilah Jaramillo and Fabian Gomez designed a system that collects rainwater from their home's roof, funneling it to a 250-gallon tub. Jaramillo and Gomez use a five-gallon bucket to dip water from the

tub to irrigate plant groupings as needed. Plantings include agaves, barrel cactus, and saguaros. Trailing rosemary near the back patio adds color and fragrance, and is generally not bothered by the free-roaming wildlife. (No wall or fence encloses the yard.)

"When you step outdoors, you see desert plants and animals. We spend a lot of time in our backyard, enjoying the sunsets and the wildlife: quail, rabbits, coyotes, javelina, hawks, and owls. And we can't forget the rattlesnakes!" says Jaramillo.

The Herr residence is located in an older, well-established Tucson neighborhood. Unlike most homes in the area, it is surrounded by native stands of creosote, prickly pear, and cholla cactus. The goal for the front yard design was to add plants that would enhance existing plantings and maintain the integrity of the natural desert scene. Chihuahuan rain sage and *Berberis trifoliolata* create a backdrop with existing natives and also help attract neighborhood wildlife. Salvia, justicia, penstemon, lantana, and red yucca produce masses of colorful flowers, drawing in hummingbirds and butterflies.

A magnificent palo verde serves as the centerpiece of the backyard landscape, providing color when in flower (April) and cooling shade for humans and plants alike throughout the year. A traditional perennial garden filled with old-fashioned flowers thrives beneath the shade and shelter of the palo verde's wide-spreading canopy.

BEST LANDSCAPE FOR ATTRACTING URBAN WILDLIFE

Harlow Gardens, for Herr residence



THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF XERISCAPE

1. Thoughtful landscape planning & design

Begin with a plan, whether it's a new or remodeled landscape. A good design will avoid wasting your water, time, and money. Think long-term, and be realistic about the space requirements of mature plants. This will help you avoid maintenance headaches later on.

2. Select low-water-use plants

Many books exist on this subject, and hundreds of native plants, as well as plants from other low-rainfall regions, are adapted to grow in the Tucson area. Keep Principle Number 1 foremost in mind before buying plants for your Xeriscape. A good design is invaluable in selecting and combining water-efficient plants that will add beauty and utility to your outdoor areas. Call the ADWR Tucson office (770-3816) for a free drought-tolerant, low-water-use plant list.

3. Appropriate turf (lawn) areas

Lawns use a lot of water. For that reason, include them when only a lawn will do, as in a children's play area. Keep the lawn area small and simple in shape, and border it with low-water-use plants. Select adapted grasses such as hybrid Bermudas. Avoid lawn for use only as a ground cover—use other water-efficient ground covers instead. Inorganic mulches such as decomposed granite use zero water and can be effective as well.

4. Efficient irrigation

Drip-irrigation systems are efficient at applying water to plants in the right amounts at the root zone. Use a timer and adjust schedules as plant needs change with age and from season to season. Check systems regularly to be sure they are working properly. If you water with a hose, learn the water requirements

This is a “leafless” landscape, save the occasional leaf drop from annual color plants that grow in large pots by the pool. Very little maintenance and very little water are required to keep this landscape attractive. Harlow selected plants for their shapes, textures, and colors. Notable species include purple prickly pear, golden barrel, saguaro, red yucca, and agaves, with *Peruvian cereus* for vertical accent.

BEST LOW-MAINTENANCE LANDSCAPE



John M. Harlow Jr.,
Harlow Gardens, for
Wetlaufer residence



BEST RETROFIT OF A HIGH-WATER USE LANDSCAPE



Margaret West, M. West
Designs, for Kennedy &
Prebis residence

The goal of this redesign was to change the landscape from high-water to low-water use, while including some plants for color and fragrance. In the front yard grow self-sowing perennials such as penstemon, angelita daisy, damiana, and desert marigold to create a “native color” look. Boulders 2–3 feet in diameter were included to add interest and substance.

In the rear yard, most of the large lawn was removed, leaving a small, manageable grassy area. Evergreens were used to screen the east wall. A small but select group of higher-water-use plants—citrus, jasmine, roses—were used sparingly for their fragrance. The remaining plants are low-water-use, selected for their ability to attract butterflies and hummingbirds.

Scott Millard, former Xeriscape Contest judge, is the author and editor of several books dealing with water-conserving landscaping, including The Low-Water Flower Gardener.

XERISCAPE CONTEST 2003

If you're inspired to enter your Xeriscape landscape, Arizona Department of Water Resources (ADWR) and Tohono Chul Park will again sponsor the contest in 2003. Separate categories are available for homeowners and professionals. Entries will be accepted January 1–April 1, 2003. For information, call Tohono Chul Park (742-6455) or ADWR (770-3816), or visit www.water.az.gov, then click on Xeriscape.

of all your plants—they can vary quite a bit. Check soil for moisture to see if plants actually *need* water. Avoid sprinkling; water deeply and infrequently after new plants are established.

5. Improve the soil

Adding organic matter to the soil before planting increases its water- and nutrient-holding capacity, which improves plant growth and efficient use of water. Annuals, perennials, and vegetables—plants that are planted in close proximity to one another—are prime candidates. Low-water-use native trees, shrubs, and ground covers usually do just fine in unimproved existing soil, but they often appreciate organic mulches. (See Principle Number 6.)

6. Use mulches

Mulch is a layer of just about any material—organic or inorganic—that covers the soil over the root area of plants. Mulch

reduces moisture loss through evaporation, insulates plant roots from heat and cold extremes, and cuts down on weed populations that steal water and nutrients from your plants. Add a few inches of organic mulch each spring—it will decompose to improve the soil.

7. Appropriate maintenance

Healthy plants grow and look better, as you would naturally expect, and use water more efficiently. Prune properly at the right time of year. Do not prune heavily at any one time, particularly during summer. Keep a close and regular eye out for pests and diseases. You want to spot them early when controls are easier and more effective. Keep up with weeds. Don't overfertilize, which can result in excessive plant growth that requires even more pruning.

